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After Bourdieu: Critique and Renewal in the Sociology of Music

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Abstract

This paper reviews the status, position and legacy of Bourdieu in the sociology of music, the waxing and waning of his influence and the recent move away from Bourdieu towards something like a post-critical engagement with musical forms and practices. The idea is to show the reaction to and treatment of Bourdieu's ideas as a gauge of where we are in the sociology of culture, the various strands of influence that emanate from his work and to assess what is at stake in a "post-Bourdieu" moment when a position once considered progressive and critical now acts as the foil against which new work is being conducted. The article engages with the contributions of three notable figures in the current intellectual landscape – Antoine Hennion, Tia DeNora and Georgina Born – and points to the significant ways these authors move debates on musico-social relations into territories more sensitive to the complex mediating qualities of music. Such work is better placed, it is argued, to represent music as an animating force in everyday life, including its specific mediating qualities "in action". At the same time, however, the construction of a new sociology of music is not without its perils. The article will conclude with some potential problems with these approaches and take stock of what might be lost as well as gained by adherence to them.

Key words

Bourdieu, music, cultural production, sociology of art, mediation, critique

Introduction

Recent developments in the sociology of music have presaged a significant shift in approaches to the relationship between music and society. Alongside an emerging focus on intellectual copyright, technological change and a globalised media system, scholars have begun the task of questioning the grounds on which an orthodox sociology of music is built (Born, 2005). Once a central strut in strong constructivist approaches to culture, where genre, taste and practice were shown to be profoundly social accomplishments, current trends have thrown into doubt sociological analyses of music that do not sufficiently engage with the specificities of musical objects and which fail to take the cognitive affordances of music seriously (DeNora, 2003). Instead, an emerging strand of new music sociology has attached to the complex ways the social and the aesthetic are embedded in and activate one another, implying a more open relationship to the material and sensuous properties of the work and a scepticism towards accounts that gloss these properties (Gomart and Hennion, 1999).

Precisely because he is a lynchpin in the field of cultural sociology, the figure of Pierre Bourdieu looms large in this movement. In many ways, Bourdieu has set the agenda for post-Marxist investigations of socio-musical practices as they play out relationally. His concepts of cultural capital, field and *habitus* in particular, have been central to the formation of a critical paradigm in music sociology that demonstrates how the social penetrates, produces or contextualises music. Bourdieu-inspired studies of both popular and classical music now occupy a good chunk of the field of music sociology. His most canonical text, *Distinction*, has provided an empirical benchmark for explorations of the nature and formation of musical taste in places like France, America and the UK (Bourdieu, 1984). And even in the less hallowed realms of music journalism, Bourdieu's terms are finding currency, with influential critics like Simon Reynolds deploying Bourdieusian categories to examine logics of populism and elitism in contemporary pop (Reynolds, 2009).

This paper reviews the status, position and legacy of Bourdieu in the sociology of music, the waxing and waning of his influence and the recent move away from Bourdieu

towards something like a post-critical engagement with musical forms and practices. The idea is to show the reaction to and treatment of Bourdieu's ideas as a gauge of where we are in the sociology of culture. Certainly along with Howard Becker, Bourdieu has been representative of a devoutly sociological approach to cultural production that has placed the aesthetic object in a network of social forces and determinants. This puts him in the line of fire as far as non-reductive accounts of culture are concerned. How, then, should we assess the impact of Bourdieu's ideas on the sub-fields of art and music sociology? What various strands of influence emanate from his work? And what is at stake in this "post-Bourdieu" moment when a position once considered progressive and critical now acts as the foil against which new work is being conducted?

After considering the presuppositions of the "old" sociology of art and its newer variants the article will discuss the impact of Bourdieu's work on music sociology in the UK and beyond. It will then move towards a discussion of newer approaches to music after Bourdieu. For this purpose, it will summarise the contributions of three notable figures in the current intellectual landscape – Antoine Hennion, Tia DeNora and Georgina Born – and point to the significant ways these authors move debates on musico-social relations into territories more sensitive to the complex mediating qualities of music. Whilst varying in tone and tenor, the paper will show how the work of these authors combine at a critical juncture in the development of a sociology of culture that does not reduce its object to a simple determination or resource for domination. Such work is better placed, therefore, to represent music as an animating force in everyday life, including its specific mediating qualities "in action". At the same time, however, the construction of a new sociology of music is not without its perils, particularly when one considers issues of analytical coverage and conceptual adequacy. The article will therefore conclude with some potential problems with these approaches and take stock of what might be lost as well as gained by adherence to them.

Post-Critical Aesthetics and the Sociology of Art

In her book *The Aesthetics of Uncertainty*, Janet Wolff excavates the possibility of a new approach to aesthetics that steers between “discredited universalisms” and “total relativism” (Wolff, 2008: 5). The challenge, Wolff argues, is to find a conceptual space that builds upon the hard-won battles of feminism, post-colonial theory and the sociology of art without reducing artistic form either to the transcendent or to the ideological. Over twenty five years after her seminal book *The Social Production of Art* (Wolff, 1981) - a text that in many ways helped shape what Chaplin (1994) calls the “critical paradigm” in the sociology of art - Wolff points up the necessity of a “post-critical aesthetics” that is attuned to questions of aesthetic value.¹ The moment is ripe, Wolff argues, for a shift in perspective that acknowledges the situated nature of judgment but does not do so at the cost of neglecting or denying the sensuous and beautiful. This is what Wolff calls a “principled aesthetic” cast in an acceptance of doubt, where a recovery of criteria for aesthetic judgment, including a non-relativist notion of beauty, is possible if we hold to a more ethically-informed idea of the object from a position of reflexive uncertainty.

Wolff is clearly not alone in trying to reconnect social scientific approaches with aesthetic experience. From Eyerman and Ring’s (1988) call to “bring meaning back in” to Harrington’s (2004) defence of an intersubjectively-shared idea of aesthetic value, sociologists are attempting to find new ways to tackle the discipline’s seeming inability to treat art as anything more than a proxy for or pseudo-reflection of the social (De La Fuente, 2007). For too long, it is argued, sociology has cast a reductionist and imperialist shadow over the arts, diminishing both the specific properties of works and the affective nature of engagements with them. It has, in other words, conducted a form of violent simplification resting on a demotion of the aesthetic to either epiphenomenon or illusion. Indeed, as Latour notes:

“Apart from religion, no other domain has been more bulldozed to death by critical sociology than the sociology of art. Every sculpture, painting, *haute cuisine* dish, techno rave, and novel has been explained to nothingness by the social factors ‘hidden behind’ them”

Certainly, orthodox sociologists of art have been adept at stripping away art's putative magic and mystery. One could argue that the whole purpose of the sub-discipline from the 1970s to the 1990s was to chip away at the claimed revelatory capacities of the art work in order to show it to be exactly that, an ordinary work assembled in ordinary contexts in collective fashion. The draw of Becker's (1982) *Art Worlds* lay precisely in its unveiling of the delusions of the romantic idea of art as special, esoteric and pure. Sociologising art, instead, rested on a pragmatic emphasis on the arbitrary status of "art" as well as the basic labour needed to produce, distribute and disseminate it. Becker's terms of reference are telling, here: not creativity but "work", not individual inspiration but "collective labour", not stylistic innovation but "convention". If the act of demystification is also a form of desacrilisation then what were once seen as luminous or cultic essences are revealed to be nothing more than prosaic social accomplishments. On artists Becker is unequivocal. The idea of uniquely-gifted individuals is a myth specific to post-Renaissance Western societies which belies the exoteric business of art worlds as collective accomplishments, including their reliance on commercial transactions and a developed infrastructure of personnel configured in decision chains. In short, works of art were not special products created by individual makers who possessed some kind of rare gift. They were, rather, "joint products of all the people who cooperate via an art world's characteristic conventions to bring works like that into existence" (Becker, 1982: 35).

By the time American production of culture scholars had applied their organisational analyses to culture, art had been inserted into an analytical frame comprised of institutional and economic forces (Peterson, 1994). Drawing on a mix of ideas from occupational sociology, the "Columbia School" and the British cultural studies tradition, sociologists like Richard A. Peterson set out to show how cultural production was governed by organisational processes such as reward systems and market structures (Santoro, 2008). It certainly wasn't the task of the sociologist to look deeply into the content of art works, nor to accept aesthetic

ideals of genius, creativity or imagination. Whilst nominally expressive and symbolic, art could only be understood sociologically if it was examined as the product of an external structural milieu and if institutional processes were bracketed off from aesthetic judgments. From this position it became easier to show how groups of “symbol producers” both created and were shaped by a socio-structural context (Peterson, 1994).

Whilst congruent with the constructivist thrust of these approaches, Bourdieu’s additional insight was to augment a sociology of organisations with an analytic of power; and one that has arguably set the agenda for critical approaches in the sociology of art. For Bourdieu (1993, 1996), the artistic field is a universe of belief caught up in cycles of consecration and succession within a domain of competitive struggle between various positions - “traditional” and “avant-garde” producers, for instance. The cumulative history of the field authorizes producers situated in a relational space to enter into strategic moves in a “game” dependent on the sum of different forms of capital possessed by the producer (economic, cultural, social and symbolic) and the historical state of the field itself. Fields of art are dynamic entities, for Bourdieu, characterized not just by the actions of various personnel such as critics, dealers and so on, but by social structural co-ordinates of power and history. Indeed, it is through processes of historical differentiation, driven by the autonomising effect of markets, that art fields are able to refract external economic and political forces. This they do whilst simultaneously serving an ideology of the “pure work” and it is this purification that Bourdieu is determined to historicize. For just as works of art are created on the pretext of strictly formal criteria, so they completely disavow their origins in structures of power and class inequality.

Like Becker, then, Bourdieu puts art into a network of social relations but does so in order to show that the “historical transcendental” is the product of a universe of collective belief – a magical belief – that turns the work into a fetish. This faith in the pure work, this *illusio* of the art world, echoes the equally unsociological Kantian belief in a universalist taste, where a capacity for aesthetic enjoyment is found amongst all human beings. Far from being an act of pure love, however, time spent with art is a misrecognized investment in a

game of social elevation through which certain dispositional orientations (the *habitus*) are produced and reproduced. So the sociological truth of art is, for Bourdieu, the uncomfortable truth of its adhesion to objective logics of structural and systematic inequality. All aesthetic pleasure is nothing more than the activation of cultural capital, the value of which is to adorn its possessor with aesthetic sensibilities, thereby excluding the culturally dispossessed. It therefore behoves the sociologist of art to shine a light into the murky waters of artistic fields to show what really guides them, to reveal the hidden depths of inequality in what appear to be disinterested practices and to demonstrate how power relations in such fields fulfil a grander role of hardening structures of social and cultural inequality at large.

As Inglis notes, despite variations in approaches within the sociology of art - including a tradition of analysis inspired by art history - there remains a recognisable “meta-discourse” that unites these strands (Inglis, 2005; Witkin, 1995).ⁱⁱ This is a discourse comprised of broadly constructivist assumptions about the social world, driven by a determination to subject what we feel to be ineffable to be profoundly social. Typically, the sociologist conducts full and detailed studies of art worlds, usually with due reference to a “social context”, cast in a revelation that aesthetic realities are actually partial, provisional and subjective constructions shaped by material social relations. In this they have largely run shy of engaging with the formal mechanisms of works of art themselves, preferring to focus on the symbolic uses of art instead.ⁱⁱⁱ

All of which makes the new aesthetic turn in the sociology of art an understandable, interesting and arguably necessary development. Even amongst progenitors of the older critical approach there is some recognition that not all aesthetic processes can be reduced to questions of power, symbolic exclusion and institutional process. Three lines of thought follow from this. In the essay “Towards a Meaningful Sociology of the Arts”, Eyerman calls for a re-engagement with questions of meaning, not as an external imposition but as bound up with processes of imagination and creativity, “as meaningful and constitutive of...a space within a space, a place from which to view the surrounding world yet not be untouched by it” (Eyerman, 2006: 19). Drawing on Adorno’s recognition of the truth-bearing potential of art

forms, Eyerman posits art as a cognitive praxis for social action and creativity, facilitated by the work of the imagination as well as an “ascribed and conditioned social practice” (Eyerman, 2006: 19). In other words, art is a means of knowing the world as well as imagining one’s place in it and this requires the sociologist of art to attend more energetically to the meaning-making dynamics of aesthetic objects.

Secondly, there is the question of the objects themselves. In an intellectual climate increasingly oriented to the material qualities of design, consumption and technology, sociologists are clearly more open than ever to consider the ways objects are artfully present in the world, the multifarious ways they resist and react. De la Fuente (2007) identifies a reconstituted engagement with the idea of the work of art in a recent study by Becker, Menger and Faulkner (2006) in which the authors recognise the need to update the “art worlds” approach to take into account the unique but also indeterminate status of the art work. Citing the Latourian idea of artwork as *actant*, the authors point to how aesthetic artefacts impose limits “on what others, including the artist or artists who are constructing it, can do” (Becker, Menger and Faulkner, 2006: 4). Again, the implication is that for all their social constructedness, cultural objects have unique material properties that mesh with everyday practices to make a difference in the world.

Finally, there is the question of judgment and value. Sociologists have traditionally been discomfited by the idea of artistic evaluation, leaving questions of aesthetic assessment to the art critic, musicologist or art historian. If judgement is present at all, it’s couched at the level of epistemological or theoretical commitment, which is itself disavowed *qua* judgment. Alternatively, as with Bourdieu, artistic value is determined by an ideology of creation whereby certain works are encrusted with “greatness” through the consecrating actions of the field and powerful field agents. This implies a relativist agnosticism towards “real” value.^{iv} Wolff’s call to re-engage with questions of judgment, then, opens up a series of questions around the grounds on which sociologists might make principled statements without resorting to outmoded universalisms. As she notes in the context of beauty, whilst this idea is very much bound up with relations of ideology and gender, it still “ought to be possible to make an

aesthetic judgment in the context of the necessary ideology-critique” (Wolff, 2006: 145). In short, the effort to work *towards* a debate about value based on a principled position of aesthetic uncertainty is a necessary step because the question of aesthetics is forced to reckon more explicitly with a post-critical ethics. It is this possibility that enervates Wolff to look for criteria of judgment based in a dialogic aesthetic theory.

Whilst the grounds for an “aesthetic turn” in the sociology of art are still being excavated, it is clear from the above that this area is opening up to territories and questions it had previously been suspicious of.^v Certainly, the limits of the old sociology of art have been questioned and new key thematics are emerging. After all the hard sociologising, there remains something to be explained, from this position - elements that escape conventional critical analyses that would otherwise reduce them to a manifestation of some underlying cause. In the case of Bourdieu, this would be cleavages in cultural capital masked by an *illusio* of grace but belied by a willingness to play the game of art.

Bourdieu and the Sociology of Music

If we are seeing the emergence of a post-critical moment in the sociology of art, it is instructive to see how this plays out in a domain with its own relatively distinct objects of analysis. Music sociology provides an interesting case, in this sense, because it constitutes one of the biggest growth areas in cultural sociology, and one where Bourdieu’s presence has been crucial. What theoretical and empirical developments can be identified as unique to this sub-field, then? What specific challenges are thrown up by an engagement with musical forms, attachments and processes? And to what extent can recent developments in the sociology of music be said to constitute a drift away from Bourdieu? Before I attempt to answer these questions, let me first briefly take stock of Bourdieu’s influence on the corpus of music sociology in order to examine what it is the “new” sociology of music is responding to.

Bourdieu rarely engaged with music directly or in any detail. In contrast to an almost obsessive preoccupation with modern literature and the visual arts - in particular, the “heroic

modernism” of Flaubert, Manet and Baudelaire - Bourdieu is relatively quiet on musical forms, practices and practitioners. This is somewhat surprising given the bold statement in *Distinction* that “nothing more clearly affirms one’s ‘class’, nothing more infallibly classifies, than tastes in music” (Bourdieu, 1982: 18).^{vi} Sure enough, Bourdieu does show music to be a relational set of objects bound to logics of social differentiation. On the basis of interview and questionnaire data, he plots class-based preferences for a selection of more or less well-disseminated musical works including Strauss’ Blue Danube (popular and therefore favoured by manual workers) and Bach’s Well-Tempered Clavier (less popular and therefore preferred by those with higher levels of cultural capital).^{vii} Elsewhere, he makes scattered references to composers like Debussy and Berlioz in order to locate them in the late 19th century field of cultural production and notes the “hagiographic exaltation” of Beethoven as the archetypal “pure” artist (Bourdieu, 1996: 149).

Apart from these sporadic engagements, however, Bourdieu largely avoids music’s social life and location. Certainly as far as popular music is concerned, Bourdieu pays no attention to the emergence of a developed commercial system, jazz is given short shrift and music-based youth formations are glossed. Of course, much of this neglect has to do with the local context that was France in the 1950s and 60s, with its specific cultural reference points and field dynamics. Rock ‘n’ Roll was a distinctly Anglo-American configuration, after all, and one that was only beginning to make waves outside of that axis. But the neglect also has to do with Bourdieu’s emphasis on legitimate culture as the basis for distinction and his relative ignorance of the complexity of popular art and culture, as some notable commentators have argued (Fowler, 1997; Shusterman, 1992). A culture that Bourdieu dismisses as high art’s poor monolithic cousin was certainly, by the 1950s and 60s, a more fissured, idiosyncratic and developed set of forms than Bourdieu allows. And he is hardly symmetrical when it comes to understanding how “high” and “low” cultures function. On the other hand, even on “classical” or “art” music, where one might expect some engagement with the avant-garde position-takings of composers like Boulez, Bourdieu is coy.

In any case, it's been largely left to sympathetic scholars to fill the gap left by this neglect and develop a sociology of music broadly influenced by Bourdieu's work. That they have done so expansively and with such enthusiasm speaks not only of the fertility of Bourdieu's concepts across a range of cultural forms, but also what Heinrich calls the "Bourdieu effect", the almost mythical status accorded to an increasingly dominant player in European scholarship (Danko, 2008). From the late 1970s onwards, then, a kind of Bourdieu paradigm of critical music sociology has materialized, based on a love of certain key texts, a following for a figure of intellectual authority and a fascination for concepts deemed suitable for application in empirical settings. From quantitative examinations of musical taste to political economies of the music industry and from Quebecois *chansonniers* to Japanese *nihon ongaku* a Bourdieusian terminology has lubricated the circuits of music scholarship (Ollivier, 2006; De Ferranti, 2002). It is nowadays rare to find a study of musical taste that does not start with or evoke Bourdieu's ideas, whilst key works such as *Distinction* and *The Field of Cultural Production* have become touchstones for studies that examine music and social structure. Meanwhile, a substantial Bourdieu culture industry has developed via the scholarly accoutrements of translation, application and interpretation. This is evident in recent texts like *Opera and Society in Italy and France from Monteverdi to Bourdieu* (Johnson, Fulcher and Ertman, 2007), where Bourdieu plays the role of both theoretical interlocutor and guide to new understandings of the operatic form.

Not that this presence has been internationally uniform. As Santoro (2009) notes, there has been a curious neglect of Bourdieu in Italian sociology, where conditions in the academic field have typically resisted the incursions of foreign authors whose works are considered a threat to existing positions. It's also the case that different national fields have appropriated Bourdieu's work in subtly different ways. In North America, Bourdieu has been used most keenly for quantitative studies of consumption and taste, although he has also been an emergent reference point for studies of Indian American dance music, studio technologies and the history of sound reproduction (Maira, 2002; Sterne, 2003; Théberge, 1997). In Israel and South America, it is Bourdieu's later work on the field concept that has been most

consistently applied to glocalised styles of pop and rock music. In Regev's (2007) comparative study of "pop-rock" fields in Israel and Argentina, for instance, the author describes the historical legitimacy of an amplified electronic aesthetic amongst critics and other field agents. Regev claims that a cosmopolitan "pop-rock habitus" amongst these agents disposes them to straddle both global and ethno-national fields in the construction of innovative strategies of production (Regev, 2007: 323). Other studies in this vein are also worth noting. Frota's (2006) analysis of canon formation in the case of *Música Popular Brasileira* shows how the constitution of the popular musical field in Brazil is linked to the advent of commercial radio stations and record companies as well as the position-takings of musicians from the 1960s. Lopes' (2000) study of the genealogy of the modern jazz paradigm in America, on the other hand, demonstrates the fecundity of the field concept as a tool to show how new aesthetic practices amongst jazz musicians were legitimated in the first half of the 20th century.

What unites many of these studies is the strategic deployment of Bourdieu's theories as a necessary first move away from orthodox histories of music in particular (national) cases. Bourdieu's work is recognised as providing critical leverage in re-writing eulogising narratives of music that fail to incorporate questions of power, struggle and exclusion. His function, in this sense, has been to help modernise studies of music by providing ammunition against internalist histories. But Bourdieu-inspired studies have had deeper and wider coverage. In some cases, scholars have examined the acquisition of specific musical practices such as vocal styles and melodic-rhythmic techniques using Bourdieu's categories (De Ferranti, 2002). In other cases, such categories are employed to map relations between broad economic contexts and cultural hierarchies in the formation of genres of popular music, including identifying the crucial role played by what Bourdieu called "cultural intermediaries" in the symbolic production of musical goods and services (Negus, 1999).

Of course, it would be wrong to suggest that Bourdieu is always used in such extensive ways in the sociology of music or that he is used uncritically. Indeed, a related axis of differentiation is the extent to which various studies deploy Bourdieu's ideas in relation to

others in the sociology of music. As a crude indicator, here, we can draw on a distinction made by Goldthorpe (2007) between “wild” and “domesticated” uses of Bourdieu. Goldthorpe argues, in the context of discussions of educational achievement, that the concept of cultural capital has been used in two ways. Firstly, in domesticated form, subject to qualifications and triangulated with a number of other positions. Secondly, in wild form, as part of a grand paradigmatic statement that explains relations between cultural capital and large-scale social reproduction in modern societies. Goldthorpe’s argument is that the wild version of Bourdieu is more faithful to the spirit of Bourdieu’s own explanatory system, but that this system itself is flawed.

Putting aside Goldthorpe’s critique of Bourdieu, we can nevertheless recognise a distinction between relative weights of analysis - Bourdieu-lite and Bourdieu-heavy - in the field of music sociology. On the one hand, making reference to Bourdieu’s concepts is part of the currency of ideas in music scholarship. Concepts like *habitus* are regularly cited in order to give academic gloss to arguments about musical practice, even if the study does not pivot on this concept. Equally, music sociologists will cast Bourdieu as one of several influential authors (including Weber, Adorno, Benjamin, Peterson and Becker) whose ideas need to be parsed in order to pay due attention to the tradition of cultural sociology itself. On the other hand, music sociologists have utilised Bourdieusian concepts more extensively to construct overarching frameworks for how the whole music-society jigsaw fits together. As Goldthorpe recognizes, Bourdieu had grand theoretical ambition in suggesting a meta-sociological narrative to explain the nature of modern social configurations. It’s unsurprising, therefore, that the spirit of these grand ambitions are also present in Bourdieu-inspired examinations of music which aim to trace the social determinations of musical practices within a system of overlapping social, economic and political fields.

From Subcultures to Sub-Fields: The UK Case

Surveying the field of the sociology of music in the UK reveals some related patterns. Over the last 30 years or so, Bourdieu's empirical and theoretical work has found a significant place in the sociological tradition in the UK amongst particularly left-leaning scholars looking for satisfactory ways to combine critical sociological examinations of social formations with analyses of the semi-autonomous domains of culture (Simeoni, 2000). As Robbins argues, Bourdieu's reception in the UK follows a series of chronological sequences mediated by issues of translation. His emergent "English identity" (Robbins, 2008: 5), which began with early translations of his fieldwork in Algeria, was fully cemented in the 1970s by his influence on the sociology of education in Britain.

An explicit "cultural turn" towards Bourdieu only took place in the 1980s when members of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies engaged with extracts and translations of *Distinction*. Interestingly, it was out of this academic milieu that some of the first sociological studies of popular music emerged, including Hebdige's *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*, which showed significant resemblances to Bourdieu's approach to the role of commodities in shaping group distinctions. Pioneering sociologists like Frith had also begun combining insights from symbolic interactionism with cultural Marxism to show how rock music in the UK articulated with class differences. By the 1980s and 90s this had developed into a concern with questions of taste in popular music and an updated political economy of the music industry influenced by Becker and Bourdieu (Frith, 1983; 1988; 1996). Particularly noteworthy, here, is Frith's insistence in *Performing Rites* that Bourdieu's arguments in *Distinction* regarding the conditions of bourgeois aesthetic pleasure could be applied just as easily to the judgments and engagements of fans of "lower" cultural forms such as popular music. In other words, discrimination and aesthetic evaluation went all the way down because music's currency was bound to processes of communication and sociality.

Today, largely because of affinities between the development of cultural sociology in the UK and the critical tenor of his ideas, Bourdieu remains a popular figure within music sociology, even if his legacy is now under scrutiny and revision. Indeed, whilst the shift from Marxist conceptions of power and ideology to more refined conceptions of "discourse",

“world” and “field” mirrors broader intellectual fashions, it also registers a shift in thematic focus from class and youth groupings to a wider range of musical phenomena, including the rise of globalised media processes, the creative industries and rights economies, as well as identity formation amongst fans and struggles over genre (Frith, 1996; Hesmondalgh, 2007). It is with respect to these micro-macro themes and processes that Bourdieu’s ideas have had remained particularly resonant.

In many respects, key works in the sociology of music in the UK loosely correspond to Bourdieu’s three main concepts. In the case of cultural capital, for instance, Thornton’s *Clubcultures* (1995) is exemplary of the attempt to rethink subcultural theory in the Birmingham cultural studies tradition through the concept of “subcultural capital”. Thornton’s was one of the first academic studies to show how judgments made within popular music could be understood as structured and structuring mechanisms through which young people accumulated “cultural goods and experiences for strategic use within their own social worlds” (Thornton, 1995: 8). Clubbing, in this sense, was a taste culture riddled with cultural hierarchies ordered around oppositions between “mainstream” clubs and “hip” clubs that articulated with the clubber’s status as either “uncool” or “authentic”. It was these distinctions that were crucial to the construction of difference in subcultural music-based clusters, according to Thornton, and which gave “full representation to the complex strata and politics of popular culture” (Thornton, 1995: 14).^{viii}

Another notable strand of analysis comprises studies mapping the relationship between social stratification and musical tastes. Taking its cue from Bourdieu’s *Distinction* as well as debates emerging from the US around the status of the “cultural omnivore”, some UK scholars have explored how the consumption of particular musical genres or styles correspond to the social backgrounds of certain groups amidst hierarchies of cultural legitimacy (Chan and Goldthorpe, 2004). Most recently, Bennett *et al*’s expansive study of cultural preferences and practices in contemporary Britain adapts Bourdieu’s model of taste to examine preferences for a range of cultural activities, including music. A key finding is that music tends to be the most divided of all the cultural forms examined, allowing the authors to

identify two broad musical communities: one skewed towards classical music with homologies to jazz, the other linking to all other forms of contemporary music, particularly rock and pop (Bennett *et al*, 2009). Here, the authors oppose their findings to Peterson and Kern's claim that high-status consumers are increasingly eclectic in their tastes and are likely to have a taste for a "wide range of low-status activities" (Peterson and Kern, 1996: 900). Instead, distinctions between heteronomous and autonomous parts of the musical field in Britain correspond to different levels of familiarity with the two musical clusters. As a result, "familiarity with classical music still acts as a form of institutional cultural capital and attendance at classical music events as a form of objective cultural capital, both of which can be converted into social capital" (Bennett *et al*, 2009).

The second driving concept in Bourdieu's theoretical armoury worth highlighting is *habitus* and its deployment has been particularly notable in UK studies accounting for the idea of music as practice, with links to taste and identity. The idea of a musical *habitus* registers a materially grounded attempt to process questions around the enculturation of the musically adept body – a body in which specific musical competences are sedimented through processes of socialisation. Toynbee (2000) adapts this point for a theory of creativity in popular music where the producer lies at the centre of a schema spinning out from music-making practices to the larger domain of social relations and markets. The musician's *habitus*, here, consists of the semi-conscious, adaptive strategies that mark out the way the agent writes, performs and records music. Toynbee introduces the idea of "likelihood" to explain Bourdieu's idea of the *habitus* as a set of dispositions that broadly orient rather than determine the actions of the musician. Thus, as far as the rock musician is concerned, certain "possibles" are skewed. It is likely, for instance, that the musician will use a guitar and a plectrum and that the sound will be amplified, whilst it is unlikely that the musician will play complex jazz chords and be female. It is through the *habitus*-field pairing as a set of constraints and possibilities that one can explain, for Toynbee, the "strong congruence between artistic disposition ('I'm a rock guitarist') and position in the field of works ('rock guitar style')" (Toynbee, 2000: 39). In which case, Bourdieu is heralded as providing a

compelling set of tools for a general model of creativity which can be applied to practices of popular music-making and the production of culture generally (Toynbee, 2000).

Finally, the field concept has been wielded with some regularity by UK-based scholars attending to the ways in which genre, style and production are constructed through the interplay of historically enshrined positions. Hibbett (2005), for instance, shows how “indie rock” is dependent on oppositions and claims around the nature of commercial and non-commercial forms of production expressed in a defiance of mainstream pop aesthetics and economies of scale. The appeal to musical purity is performed in a context of pre-existing structures inherent in all modern cultural fields whereby claims to authenticity are coded manifestations of strategies of social positioning - in this case, towards indie music’s cultural value as autonomous and deserving of the highest standards of art (see also Hesmondalgh, 1999). Webb (2004), on the other hand, adapts the field concept to develop a theory of musical milieus sensitive to the subjective mediations of place in the case of Bristol and the genre of “trip hop”. Lastly, my own work on the contemporary electronica genre known as “glitch” is largely dependent on the field concept to show how experiments with laptops and the sounds of technological error are part of a long standing tradition of succession and brinkmanship in the restricted sub-field (Prior, 2008).

These examples show how music sociology in the UK, particularly in the post-1980s period, has been coloured by Bourdieu’s conceptual palette. Whilst not always completely “wild” about Bourdieu, key scholars working in this tradition have nevertheless contributed to a raft of generally sympathetic UK-based applications and treatments. Such work can be said to represent a second phase of technical and practical inference in the sociology of music that has worked up and worked with Bourdieu’s ideas. But, as we enter a third phase of critical reappraisal, it is clear that Bourdieu’s legacy is, at the very least, under question and at the most, under erasure. The rest of this article will attempt to take stock of this reappraisal and examine some emergent alternatives in the context of a post-Bourdieu sociology of art and music.

The Post-Bourdieu Moment: Born, Hennion and DeNora

In the domain of music sociology, the call for a more sophisticated engagement with musical objects has become increasingly insistent. Here, sociologists have begun the task of building something like a post-critical approach to music that aims to give due credence to the rich complexities of aesthetic expression, materiality and attachment. Three figures, in particular, have been energetic in clearing the way towards a fresh analysis of music in a post-Bourdieu register: Georgina Born, Tia DeNora and Antoine Hennion. And whilst they all have distinct voices, trajectories and agendas (Hennion's debt is mainly to the traditions of phenomenology and Actor Network Theory, DeNora takes her cue from a sympathetic re-reading of Adorno's aesthetic theory, whilst Born combines what she calls a "sociological hermeneutics" with anthropological approaches to material culture), they all share a determination to move the intellectual agenda on music into territories unencumbered by over-simplified accounts of cultural production and consumption. In many respects, therefore, these three authors constitute a new wave of theoretically-informed positions set against previous orthodoxies in the sociology of culture, in which an interest in the specific properties of music have inflected the outcome in important ways.

In a recent paper outlining a "post-Bourdieuian theory of cultural production", Georgina Born writes: "if we look to Bourdieu to fill out a sociological aesthetics and to address the specificity of the art object, we look in vain" (Born, 2010: 7). Bourdieu's impoverished analysis of popular aesthetics is compounded, for Born, by an inability to address important questions around creative agency and artistic purpose. This is because Bourdieu's theorisation of aesthetic qualities is a negatively sceptical one, even in books like *The Rules of Art* which claim to show the historical autonomisation of aesthetic positions. Here, questions of form are collapsed, for Born, into an account of conflict between positions hierarchically arranged in a way that refuses to admit either the mediating effects of art or the creative decisions of the producer. This translates into a denial of artistic value beyond the *social* value of art in cementing certain taste clusters or positions.

The requirement to move beyond Bourdieu is therefore announced as an explicit principle for broadening the grounds on which a complete theory of the social and the aesthetic can be based. Born gravitates to anthropologists of culture such as Alfred Gell, Christopher Pinney and Steven Feld as supports for an analysis of the “distinctive ontologies that inform expressive practices” (Born, 2010: 16). Such practices are intimately bound, for these authors, to both the authorial subjectivities of creators and to the material properties of works themselves. It is to this less socialised version of the interplay between objects and agency that Born is attracted. Hence, as far as music is concerned, it is the concept of “mediation” that serves Born best in getting at how objects afford a continual relay of translation of distinct processes and effects. Mediation hints at how music’s properties are in a constant state of assemblage and production “continually, immanently open to re-creation” as she puts it in an earlier paper (Born, 2005: 26). Indeed, whilst music is said to be a medium that disrupts dualisms around the separation of subject and object, present and past, production and reception, musical works also possess “careers” in that they condense creative labour just as they are subject to temporal change. Born’s argument, then, hinges on the promotion of a complex, multiform analysis that takes its cue from music as a “paradigmatic multiply-mediated, immaterial and material, fluid quasi-object, in which subjects and objects collide and intermingle” (Born, 2005: 7). At an advanced theoretical level, she makes a case for replacing the rusty frameworks of *habitus*, field and capital with a more eclectic space of theorising the work and the subject across time and space.

The theme of musical mediations is also apparent in Antoine Hennion’s neo-phenomenological analysis of cultural encounters. Here, Hennion attempts to show what musical works do and what they make us do in their affordances, occurrences and effects. Hennion argues that if we start from the assumption that taste is an activity rather than a socially determined stock of capital, then we can begin to demonstrate how direct contact with objects (wine, art works, pieces of music) necessitates a shift from self to object. In other words, such objects are involved in an intensified contact that implies that they interrupt us and offer themselves up to us – for instance, they are able to surprise us and announce their

presence to us. In short, taste is a practice of attachment in which we exchange properties with the object and in which what counts is what happens in the encounter, rather than what is determined by external social forces. This returns Hennion to the importance of describing specific engagements amongst real-world audiences actively involved in practices of playing and listening, “with its moments, its tools, its arrangements and emotional effects” (Hennion, 1999: 1). The figure of the musical amateur is interjected by Hennion because it is in the passionate techniques of attachment between amateurs and their objects of desire (records, instruments, scores, playback devices) that one can recognize both the material sensations sparked by objects and the modalities of passion characteristic of the pull of music itself (Gomart and Hennion, 1999: 231). Hence, as he writes:

“To ‘taste’ does not mean to signify one’s own social identity, to wear a badge of allegiance to this or that role, to obey a ritual, or read passively and according to one’s competencies the properties already ‘contained’ within a product. It is a ‘performance’: it acts, it engages, it transforms and makes one sensitized”

(Hennion, 2008: 43).

Such a shift from determinism to action, for Hennion, forces us to attend to the significant adjustments and gestures that mark themselves in the inner details of consumption and to deliver to the sociology of music taste a chance to properly register its object rather than to reduce it to an effect of the social.

This emphasis on the affective and sensual qualities of musical encounters is fully developed in Tia DeNora’s *Music and Everyday Life* (2000). Here, DeNora illustrates how music is a technology of self-regulation bound up with the modification and management of emotional states. Based on ground level data on the uses of music in local settings (from commuting to aerobics classes), DeNora shows how a focus on the creative contours of agency gives us a richer understanding of how music possesses ordering properties *vis-à-vis* the activities and scenes that compose everyday life (see also Bull, 2007). The fact that actors

actively deploy music to craft their on-going emotional and biographical selves shows how music “gets into action”, for DeNora, shaping the “inner sonorous life” of individual subjectivities. Or as she puts it, “respondents make...articulations between musical works, styles and materials on the one hand and modes of agency on the other” (2000: 53).

Here, DeNora’s theoretical debt is to Adorno, particularly the latter’s emphasis on music as a potentially transformative (and manipulative) force of consciousness and cognitive praxis. Identifying music’s formal properties is crucial, to this extent, because the immanent qualities of music (tone, structure, timbre and so on) are distinct to how they act upon those who come into contact with them. All of which implies that we need to move away from a sociology *of* music “a sociology about how musical activity (composition, performance, distribution, reception) is socially shaped” (DeNora, 2003: 36) towards a sociology *with* music – one that does not ignore music’s “discursive and material powers” (DeNora, 2003: 39). Like Hennion, then, DeNora argues for a shift from an analysis of “what” music does to “how” it matters in particular social settings. This, DeNora argues, would constitute a desired theoretical advancement towards a more nuanced music sociology fit for its objects of analysis.

The Challenges of Critique and Renewal

This triumvirate of figures offers a truly compelling and innovative attempt to push the edifice of cultural sociology (a field that has made little headway in tackling the thorny issue of the social and the aesthetic over the last 20 years) into relatively uncharted territories. In tailoring their conceptual schemes to tackle new ontologies of musical processes, these authors demonstrate what was missing in strong constructivist approaches to culture. Returning to Bourdieu after reading Hennion, one is struck by how flat Bourdieu’s analysis of the work of art is, how synoptic, inert and mechanical the cultural encounter can seem. Equally, Born and DeNora’s accounts lend themselves to thoughtful strategies of engagement with aesthetic processes and objects by treating these engagements and objects seriously

rather than dismissing them as weapons of bourgeois power or manifestations of deep social forces.

But, of course, with innovation comes danger and at the very least, these new approaches have to be both wary of the potential pitfalls of their endeavours and reflexive about their own auspices – what drives the analysis, but also what new problems may arise in this moment of critique and renewal. Three issues are worth highlighting in particular.

Firstly, there is the problem of finding the precise terminology and language in the absence of an established sub-discipline of sociological aesthetics. What was notable about the critical paradigm in arts sociology was the way it replaced a vocabulary of “creativity”, “artist” and “expression” with that of “cultural production”, “cultural producer” and “cultural work”. This was, as Wolff notes, “a way of ensuring that the way in which we talk about art and culture does not allow or encourage us to entertain mystical, idealised and totally unrealistic notions about the nature of this sphere” (Wolff, 1981: 138). The question is, which terms, metaphors and tropes best fit the new aesthetic agenda in sociology and how adequate are they in relaying both the subtleties and sociologies of these objects?

A key dilemma is that in forging new ground one inevitably falls onto terms that are already inscribed with meanings sedimented by pre-existing traditions and disciplines. How possible, after all, is it to evoke ideas of “creativity”, “expression”, “creative agency” and “form” without ghosting into 19th century ideologies of Romanticism? How does one separate the “thing itself” from discourses of the thing? The content of these terms are, in other words, already heavily loaded with sets of assumptions about the world. As Frith has recently noted, for instance, the term “creativity” can only be understood as a discursive effect of particular social institutions that equate the term with ideas of originality, difference and innovation (Frith, unpublished). As a result, creativity is both an explanation and justification for the authority of certain musicians (such as composers) over others (such as session musicians). To put it another way, creativity as a term is only meaningful in societies that have a particular notion of selfhood and innovation. One way round this terminological tethering is, of course, to bring in a *new* set of terms, such as “mediation”, “assemblage”, “contingency”

and “attachment”. This allows authors to construct a novel toolkit without being too weighed down with historical interpretation. But at times, it is clear that these authors still rely on concepts and terms redolent of less sophisticated approaches, inevitably evoking outmoded terms and traditions, including a tendency to align musical practice to unfettered expression, radical autonomy and aesthetic individualism.

A related danger is that in giving at least some ground to art history, musicology or aesthetics, a concession unwittingly becomes a sliding into very traditional, un-reconstituted and reactionary analyses that resurrect universalist ideas of creativity, judgment and independent aesthetic value (Zangwill, 2002). Indeed, the call for a rapprochement between humanities and sociology alluded to by Born, Wolff and others, whilst laudable on paper, can create cumbersome combinations or forced syntheses, rather than productive dialogues. There’s the danger, here, of creating a false harmony for the sake of a very muddy interdisciplinarity that dilutes the projects of all concerned: a little musicology for formal analysis of the work, a little Husserl for temporality, a little Merleau-Ponty to bring in the body, a touch of Foucault for subjectivity, a whiff of Deleuze for some difference, some cultural anthropology and Actor Network Theory for the object. All of which might end up in a mish-mash theoretical pragmatism that wants the best of all worlds. Whilst theoretical eclecticism can be a useful corrective to siding with a single theorist, it can also end up as a marriage of inconsistent premises. In other words, a move to bring disciplines together doesn’t always create an adjunction or qualification, but can end in an admixture that does violence to all disciplines.

Secondly, in staking out a position in part opposition to a conventional critical account of music, there is a danger of moving too far in the opposite direction purely in order to make the point. In other words, in eschewing approaches couched in traditional ideas of ideology, power or distinction, there could be a tendency to over-cook the alternative and ignore what might have been salvageable in previous positions. Should we never, as many Bourdieusians do, use statistics? Is it never the case that taste is a social weapon? There’s an appealing element of traditions like phenomenology, and disciplines like anthropology and

aesthetics because they appear to offer a way out of determinism. The question is, how much do they replace sociology with a kind of micro-aestheticism? And how much do they assert the primacy of agency by collapsing social context into a series of intersubjectively negotiated interpretations of the aesthetic object? After all, it's one thing to say what is currently "good" as a critique of Bourdieu, it's another to dismiss everything he says as outside the limits of what can possibly be known from a critical sociological standpoint. If all that happens is "in the encounter", as Hennion argues, then is this not another (albeit rather scintillating) form of aesthetic individualism? To flip the question around, if it is the case that there is more to art and culture than crude social class determinisms, then does that mean we are merely left to describe singular aesthetic moments of attachment?

Finally, in seeking alternatives to Bourdieu, it could be argued that the post-critical analysis replaces one form of theoretical imperialism with another, in the name of a post-imperialist reconstruction (however eclectic) that makes an exception of itself. What I mean by this is that Bourdieu, as already noted, is held as a figure who wields sociology as a weapon to deconstruct all domains of knowledge and practice: from religion and science, to art and education. For some, he's a sociological imperialist who seems immune from his own critique of knowledge as interested and inseparable from power (Inglis, 2005). But those who make this charge are often just as wont to construct theoretical edifices that, whilst post-Bourdieuian in some senses, are still making truth claims that end up offering a similarly substantialist attempt to explain the world (but often unreflexively). Indeed, whilst the new sociology of culture might claim to be less imperialist than its predecessor, one could argue that its precisely in its attempt to capture the domain of the aesthetic that it continues this imperialism. For if one casts the aesthetic as the sociology of culture's erstwhile "other" then would it be too much of a stretch to suggest that this might just be the latest move in a (post-colonial) logic of tolerance and assimilation?

This might be an unfair analogy. After all, there is no sense that the new sociologists of music are setting out to conquer other disciplinary territories in the name of a post-positivist superpower. What it does do, however, is raise the important question of how

intellectual strategising is inseparable from the business of professionalized cultural production in academic settings.

Conclusion

In attempting to engage with what was, up to recently, thought of as a discredited domain of the aesthetic, sociologists have made great strides in moving debates around art, music and society forward. Not only have they conceptualized cultural production in ways that are more faithful to the precise contours of cultural works, attachments and practices, but they have revealed deep lacunae in previous accounts that secreted their objects before properly engaging with them. But in the brave new world of the sociology of aesthetics, there are costs and benefits. The drift away from Bourdieu involves elements of both. For whilst Bourdieu's programme for a sociology of art leaves important questions unanswered, particularly regarding questions of form, style and content, it nevertheless remains one of the most comprehensive and generative frameworks of sociological analysis. Ignoring the continuing applicability and relevance of Bourdieu's ideas to art and culture can therefore leave a hole where a treatment of power-mediated artistic relations might be found. This is particularly the case when the disciplinary limits driving the odd and often incommensurable relationship between humanities and social sciences point up instances of failed integration.

In some respects, then, we might best be served by a continuing dialogue between older and newer approaches in the spirit of a pluralist agonism where one permits an "adversary whose existence is legitimate and must be tolerated", to borrow Chantal Mouffe's formulation (Mouffe, 1993: 4). This would also permit a strategic retreat from aesthetics, when called for. The danger is that in pressing sociologists into aesthetic discourses, sociology dilutes its own project, producing second-rate aesthetics rather than first-rate sociology (Prior, 2007). Indeed, if agonism is a form of constant but productive conflict, then what competing conceptions do is deepen our knowledge and illustrate what is lost if one imposes a final resolution of conflicts. In short, there might be some advantage in seeing

attempts at a sociological aesthetics as an instance of the success of failure, where authors addressing perplexities in the sociology of culture and music wrestle with similar dilemmas, but in the process reveal the limits of the enterprise itself.^{ix}

All of which suggests a call, before ditching him completely (or forgetting him) of entertaining the agonistic element in Bourdieu, of twisting and skewing him, of deploying him strategically in battle to overly internalist readings of culture as well as cultural sociologies that give culture too much autonomy (a tendency, perhaps, in the so-called “strong programme” of cultural sociology). In short, of making him part of the ammunition in an open dialogue between sociologists, art historians and musicologists. If this dialogical battle is missing, conflict can too easily be replaced by a weak, murky and anodyne middle ground, the analytical equivalent to liberal individualism or the politics of a “third way” that assumes that there is nothing left to fight for but details. There is clearly much to be gained by a critical engagement with aesthetics, but also much to lose if sociology attempts to leapfrog its own grounds in an attempt to move beyond itself. Bourdieu’s is not the only game in town when it comes to the analysis of art and culture, but it’s clearly the most developed, sophisticated and most importantly, sociological. And that’s something still worth holding on to.

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Endnotes

ⁱ It's worth mentioning that Wolff always had her doubts about the explanatory value of sociology when it came to aesthetic questions. Hence in *The Social Production of Art*, she admits that whilst the category of the aesthetic is arbitrary and bounded by a specific historical configuration it “resists any simple determinism of its objects by extra-discursive elements” (Wolff, 1981: 141). In other words, even in this early text Wolff entertained uncertainty about sociology's hold on aesthetic matters, particularly the discipline's attempt to reduce the aesthetic to ideological or social structural determinants.

ⁱⁱ Witkin's *Art and Social Structure*, (1995) takes its cue from the “grand version” of the social history of art represented by Arnold Hauser, where substantial stylistic changes in art are linked to and reflected in material structures, such as changing urban political and social class configurations. Hauser's approach is finessed by Witkin, however, to show how shifts in style, including the

historically recursive adherence to a broadly perceptual-realist aesthetic are homologous to certain tendencies in broader social structures that shape levels of individual autonomisation and the nature of perceptual schemes.

ⁱⁱⁱ All this makes sense of the profound asymmetry in traffic between art history and sociology. For whilst the former, in the reconstructed guise of “new” art history, has been ready to assimilate concepts and issues central to modernist sociology such as ideology, social stratification and power, sociology has largely avoided predilections for examining the content or form of artworks (Rees and Borzello, 1986). Indeed, the story of arts sociology has something of the revenge scenario about it as the discipline has at times embraced a kind of anti-aesthetic cynicism towards the art world by deconstructing its “real” internal assumptions (Inglis, 2005). If the humanities and arts spoke about creativity, sociologists quickly deconstructed the concept as nebulous, ideological and reductive. If the art historian evoked ideas of genius, the sociologist was there to remind them that such a notion was the product of a matrix of powerful discourses that constructed the artist as outside the social. Similar reactions awaited claims for “expression” and “autonomy”, deemed as products of a specific ideological formation of romanticism and Kantianism.

^{iv} In any case, for sociologists of art like Heinrich, sociologists should studiously avoid making any value judgments at all about their objects of analysis and insist only on describing how these values come about in others. The resultant relativist or pluralist position of the sociologist of art often guides the analysis away from interpretation towards pragmatic or empirical description (see Danko, 2008).

^v In many ways it could be said that the new aesthetic agenda mirrors a broader return to some of the biggest questions of morality, truth, beauty in a climate of intellectual reconstruction beyond the excesses of the postmodern turn (Eagleton, 2003). And whilst Wolff certainly doesn’t dismiss the insights of Bourdieu on class-based fields of art, she is nevertheless adamant in resisting “some of the arguments of the anti-aesthetic, disagreeing with the assumption that the beautiful and the political are necessarily in conflict” (Wolff, 2008: 154).

^{vi} For Bourdieu, this is less to do with the nature of musical works themselves than the fact that the means of acquiring musical capital (in the form of playing “noble” instruments, for instance) is more invisible than, say, visiting an art museum and displaying one’s knowledge of painting. It is the most “spiritual” of the arts precisely because listening is considered (or “constructed” as) an “inner” quality of deep, and spiritual engagement. Hence, as he puts it: “Music is the ‘pure’ art par excellence. It says nothing and has *nothing to say*...Music represents the most radical and most absolute form of the negation of the world, and especially the social world, which the bourgeois ethos tends to demand of all forms of art” (Bourdieu, 1984: 19).

^{vii} A taste for the French singer Jacques Brel is placed somewhere in between. Lower social groups are also identified as less able to name the sixteen composers of classical works read out to them in interview, whilst higher groups struggle to dignify “songs” (Bourdieu’s shorthand for popular music) as legitimate, so they end up preferring the most consecrated, but essentially middle-brow, works of Edith Piaf and Charles Trénet.

^{viii} Music-based identity claims are one expression of this strata. In addition to Thornton’s study, the cultural capital concept has been used to make sense of Johnny Rotten as a cultural agent in the historically significant movement of punk rock in the UK (Albiez, 2003). As Albiez argues, whilst uneducated, Rotten cultivated and capitalised on a counter-hegemonic strategy of identity formation, deploying his working class cultural capital to oppose and shock the dominant culture.